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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00
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AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0395

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT IZ
SUBJECT: COURT SENTENCES ALLEGED PERPETRATORS OF NAJAF AND KERBALA INCIDENTS

REF: (A) BAGHDAD 311, (B) BAGHDAD 366

1. SUMMARY: SPECIAL COURT HANDED DOWN EIGHT DEATH SENTENCES AND FIFTEEN LIFE SENTENCES ON PRISONERS ARRESTED FOR RECENT INCIDENTS AT NAJAF AND KERBALA. DEATH SENTENCES REPORTEDLY CARRIED OUT. BALANCE OF OVER 2,000 DETAINEES RELEASED. AGAINST BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC SHOW OF SUPPORT BY SHIA LEADERS, GOI LAUNCHES P.R. CAMPAIGN TO PORTRAY ITSELF AS STRONG BUT TOLERANT. AUTHORITIES SEEM TO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN RESTORING FULL CONTROL, BUT EVENTS HAVE HAD STRONG PSYCH-
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OLOGICAL IMPACT ON REGIME. END SUMMARY.

2. REVOLUTIONARY COMMAND COUNCIL SET UP SPECIAL COURT FEBRUARY 23 COMPRISED OF THREE LEADING FIGURES OF REGIME, RCC MEMBER IZZAT MUSTAFA AND BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBERS HASAN ALI AND FLAYIH HASAN. LATTER TWO ARE SHIA. COURT MET AND PASSED SENTENCES IN CAMERA, REPORTEDLY ON

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THE SAME DAY OF ITS FORMATION. SENTENCES ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 24 INCLUDED EITH CONDEMNED TO DEATH, ONE OF WHOM WAS SYRIAN NATIONAL MUHAMMAD ALI NA'NA', THE ALLEGED SYRIAN AGENT WHO WAS ACCUSED OF ATTEMPTING TO BOMB THE MOSQUE OF HUSSEIN IN JERBALA. OTHERS CONDEMNED TO DEATH, THE FIF-TEEN SENTENCED TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT AND THE EIGHTY-SEVEN NAMED DEFENDANTS WHO WERE RELEASED ARE, SO FAR AS CAN BE DETERMINED, IRAQI SHIA OF NO PARTICULAR PROMINENCE. OVER TWO THOUSAND OTHER DETAINEES HAVE BEEN RELEASED, ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS AND LOCAL PRESS REPORTS. A USINT SOURCE WHO HAS CLOSE LINKS WITH IRAQI INTELLIGENCE INFORMS US THAT THE EIGHT DEATH SENTENCES WERE CARRIED OUT SHORTLY AFTER THEY WERE HANDED DOWN AND BEFORE THE SENTENCES WERE ANNOUNCED.

3. GOI HAS CONDUCTED A CAREFULLY STAGED CAMPAIGN TO PORTRAY ITSELF AS A REGIME IN FULL CONTROL OF THE SITUATION AND PREPARED, THEREFORE, TO BE LENIENT WITH THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE DISTURBANCES. ON FEBRUARY 22, THE DAY PRIOR TO FORMATION OF THE SPECIAL COURT, PRESIDENT BAKR HELD HIGHLY PUBLICIZED AUDIENCES FOR SHIA DIVINES AND SECULAR LEADERS FROM NAJAF AND KERBALA. THE ANNOUNCEMENT WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE SENTENCES STRESSED THAT THE IRAQI LEADERSHIP HAD DECIDED NOT TO FOLLOW ITS TRADI-TIONALLY FIRM AND SEVERE ATTITUDE TOWARD TRAITORS AND ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE. IT LIMITED DEATH SENTENCES ONLY TO THE FIGURES WHO PARTICIPATED IN PLANNING THE CRIME AND LIFE SENTENCES TO THOSE WHO PLAYED A LESSER BUT KNOWING ROLE. THOSE WHO WERE DELUDED AND HAD NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE FULL CONFIDENTIAL

DIMENSIONS OF THE CONSPIRACY WERE SET FREE, THEREBY LESSENING THE UTILITY OF THE MASTER PLOTTERS OF SOCIAL PRETEXTS WHICH THEY HAD EMPLOYED AND COULD EMPLOY IN FUTURE CONSPIRACIES. ACCORDING TO THE IRAQ NEWS AGENCY, RELIGIOUS AND POPULAR QUARTERS IN NAJAF AND KERBALA HAVE EXPRESSED "SATISFACTION": AT THE SENTENCES AND NOTED THAT THEY DEMONSTRATED "REVOLU-TIONARY FLEXIBILITY."

4. EVENTS IN KERBALA AND NAJAF HAVE APPARENTLY HAD HEAVY PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON REGIME, AND SENIOR LEADERSHIP WAS PREOCCUPIED WITH THESE DEVELOPMENTS FOR SEVERAL DAYS. REGIME WAS APPARENTLY CONCERNED OVER POSSIBILITY THAT THESE EVENTS WERE PART OF A LARGER COUP ATTEMPT AND TOOK IMMEDIATE PRECAUTIONS THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. MORE RECENTLY, THE ATMOSPHERE IN BAGHDAD HAS BECOME LESS TENSE, AND RECENT VISITORS TO KERBALA HAVE SEEN MINIMAL EVIDENCE OF SECURITY. FOREIGN DELEGATES TO A REGIONAL LEGAL CONFERENCE WERE ALLOWED TO ENTER THE COURTYARD OF THE MOSQUE OF HUSSEIN, AN EXTREMELY RARE EXPERIENCE FOR NON-MUSLIMS EVEN

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IN THE BEST OF TIMES. EVEN MORE REMARKABLY, THEIR VISIT TOOK PLACE ON FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 25, THE DAY FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF SENTENCES.

5. COMMENT: FOR THE TIME BEING, AT LEAST, THE AUTHORITIES APPEAR TO HAVE STUFFED THE GENII OF SHIA UNREST BACK INTO THE BOTTLE. WE HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE THAT THE ANTI-REGIME LEAFLET DESCRIBED IN REF. A WAS WIDELY DISTRIBUTED AND ARE LEANING TO THEORY THAT USE OF THE NAME "ISLAMIC PATRIOTIC FRONT" WAS INTENDED TO GIVE BOGUS POLITICAL CONTENT TO DISTURBANCES WHICH WERE ESSENTIALLY SPONTANEOUS AND RELIGIOUS IN THEIR ORIGIN. OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS CONTINUE TO ALLUDE TO "IMPERIALIST AND REACTIONARY CIRCLES" WHICH WERE BEHIND NAJAF SHOOTING FRAY, BUT THIS HAS ALMOST PRO FORMA, INCANTETORY TONE. MOST PROBABLE EXPLANATION OF SERIES OF EVENTS IS THAT SOCIO-RELIGIOUS FRICTION WAS MISHANDLED BY LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN NAJAF, WAS THEN EXPLOITED BY STILL
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UNKNOWN ANTI-REGIME ELEMENTS AND FINALLY ESCALATED TO SHOOTING FRAY AT THE HAYDARIYA POLICE POST. IN RESPONSE, BAATH AUTHORITIES FABRICATED A PLOT TO BLOW UP MOSQUE OF HUSSEIN, UNDERTOOK MASSIVE SECURITY OPERATION TO LOCATE "PERPETRATORS" AND SUBSEQUENTLY TRIED TO POSE AS DEFENDERS OF BOTH REVOLUTION AND ORDERLY RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES. REGIME IS APPARENTLY DISSATISFIED THAT SECURITY AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PRODUCE MORE SOLID EVIDENCE OF OUTSIDE MEDDLING. WHAT MIGHT LOOK LIKE AN OVERREACTION IN THE LEVEL OF FORCE EMPLOYED AND THE NUMBERS EXECUTED IS A FAIRLY NATURAL RESPONSE BY A REGIME WHICH FEELS INSECURE AND IS FULLY PREPARED TO TAKE WHATEVER STEPS IT DEEMS NECESSARY TO STAY IN POWER.
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